

**URBAN
AGENDA**

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Implementation period
2018-2021

Urban Agenda for the EU

Raise awareness for public libraries and their new tasks on a European and National Level

Action 5

November 2021

Photo Cover Page: Vincent Mosch © ZLB

(Sunday opening in the America Memorial Library in Berlin - Dream Library - artistic intervention)

Notice :

This version of the report on Action 5 "Raise Awareness for public libraries and their new tasks on a European and National Level" in the framework of the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnership "Cultural and Cultural Heritage" is a draft version. The publication of the final version is expected by the end of 2022. We welcome your reactions and are open to discussing the recommendations for action outlined below.

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Action 5

Raise awareness for public libraries and their new tasks on a European and National Level

1) Who we Are

Action Leader

City of Berlin, Senate Department for Culture and Europe

Action Group Members

City of Espoo

Stakeholders permanently involved

- EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations)
- Public Libraries 2030
- Deutscher Bibliotheksverband e.V. (German Library Association)
- Suomen kirjastoseura (Finnish Library Association)
- Berlin Central and Regional Library
- Humboldt University Berlin, School of Library and Information Science

2) Background context

The public library is the cultural institution that has been an integral part of Europe's cities and municipalities for over a century. It is popular among all social and age groups and reaches 10 to 50 percent of the urban population as active users.

Over the last century, the "public library" as an institution has undergone a number of fundamental changes. The past 20 years have shown that public libraries have taken on the challenges of the early Internet era and the increasing digitalization in many areas of life. Although this development is not yet finished, other important trends such as demographic change, increasing diversity and climate change are on track. To be able to adequately accompany and support the urban population in times of major social transformation processes, public libraries – as local cultural, educational and social institutions that preserve and communicate cultural heritage and enable cultural as well as social participation – require attention and support from relevant European institutions for their new and growing tasks. However, recent decades have been marked by budget cuts and closures of public libraries in many EU Member States.

While public libraries with classic media offerings such as books and journals still reach a large part of the population, they constantly need to adapt to changing conditions. Considering the increasingly scarce non-commercial public space, public libraries offer themselves as so-called "third places"¹, which are places for the entire urban society that make major contributions in helping and developing communities. As low-threshold contact points, public libraries offer opportunities for exchange, collaboration, community building, learning, and thus for identification with the local community.

Up to 30 % of the adult population in Germany still only have the most basic reading and writing skills². As far as digital development is concerned, over 40% of the EU population still lacks basic digital skills (DESI 2020 Report³). Moreover, libraries address important current social problems in literacy and basic education. Public libraries also address these problems through their diverse activities in the fields of literacy and basic education.

¹ First place: the home and those that one lives with, Second place: the workplace, Third place: Place of exchange and social contact, see also: Oldenburg, Ray (1989). The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day.

² Grotlüschen, Anke; Buddeberg, Klaus; Dutz, Gregor; Heilmann, Lisanne; Stammer, Christopher (2019): LEO 2018 – Leben mit geringer Literalität. Pressebroschüre, Hamburg, available at: <http://blogs.epb.uni-hamburg.de/leo>

³ Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_1022



Bibliothek am Luisenbad in Berlin, Photo: © dbv/Thomas Meyer/Ostkreuz

Therefore, in addition to literacy and media literacy services, digital literacy services in all age groups are becoming increasingly important. In times of so-called fake news and hate speech in the digital orbit, it is a special social task of libraries to strengthen social cohesion by teaching media competence and a sense of digital responsibility. Low-threshold access to information provided by the online services of public libraries as well as training in the use of digital devices promote the participation of all people in the digital development of society as a whole and can thus make a significant contribution to education and democratic participation. In terms of social and cultural participation, public libraries are comparable with other municipal cultural institutions, such as municipal museums, art schools, public music schools, and cultural houses and centres.

3) Objectives

Despite their high relevance for digital and social participation and community empowerment, recognition of public libraries at the European level remains limited. Public libraries rarely appear in documents published by the European Commission (e.g. strategies, policies and

funding proposals), the Council of the European Union (e.g. Council Conclusions) and the European Parliament (e.g. reports on the Commission's proposed regulations) when it comes to addressing challenges such as literacy and lifelong learning, social and digital inclusion as well as democracy and community building. Excluding public libraries from such documents also means that they are not included in European policies, programmes, initiatives or funding.

The action aims to raise awareness for public libraries, their additional tasks and contributions to successful social urban development at the European and national levels. The objective is to build bridges between public libraries and the European level, to show how libraries can support the EU in achieving its goals and to provide recommendations on how the European level could connect more strongly to public libraries and vice versa. While emphasizing on "better funding", the action also focuses on the two other objectives of the Urban Agenda, "better knowledge" and "better regulation". Further integration of public libraries in European policies, programmes and initiatives will help them, not only financially, to be places for the entire European society and as key institutions that foster democratic participation.

4) Results and main outcomes

Throughout 2021, various activities were carried out to raise political awareness of the potential of public libraries for national and European politics in the context of community building and social cohesion, which in the best sense will be reflected in better funding and stronger consideration at the European and national level of the municipal service 'public library'.

The events and meetings held as part of the action were a central component of an exchange of information and experience with national and European stakeholders and will be maintained beyond the formal duration of the action in the framework of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

	Milestones	Objectives		Scope
1	Regular Action Group Meetings	Exchange of experience on various issues (e.g., digital inclusion, funding structures, EU priorities) linked to the subject, exchange of information on the implementation of the action	March 2021 to April 2022	Better knowledge
2	Questionnaire among national public library associations	Assess on which topics and challenges public libraries expect greater support from the European level	February 2021	Better funding, Better knowledge
3	Document/Policy Analysis in collaboration with the School of Library and Information Science, Humboldt University Berlin	Draw attention to missed opportunities concerning library potentials in policies and politics	March to November 2021	Better regulation

4	Overview Report "Libraries on the European Agenda" by Public Libraries 2030	Analyse the potentials of public libraries to address European challenges	May 2021	Better knowledge
5	1 st joint webinar with EBLIDA "Public libraries as centres of European cities – Are they also on the European agenda?"	Publicize the action as well as its purpose and presentation of the outcomes of the report by Public Libraries 2030	27 th May 2021	Better knowledge
6	Presentation of the action during the Next Library Festival 2021	Publicize the action as well as its purpose and outcomes and discuss it with the Next Library Community	3 rd June 2021	Better knowledge
7	Contribution to the debate "Promoting the European values through education and culture" by State Secretary Gerry Woop (Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe) at the Committee of the Regions	Emphasize the importance of public libraries to informal and lifelong learning as well as social and digital inclusion	30 th June 2021	Better knowledge
8	Survey on funding structures for public libraries in Europe	Knowledge of sources and financial opportunities to modernise and foster innovation in European public libraries.	September to November 2021	Better funding, Better knowledge
9	2 nd joint webinar with EBLIDA "Sustainability in Public Libraries – Better Funding for a great good place"	Publicize the action as well as its purpose and outcomes and connect it with the question of sustainable development	23 rd November 2021	Better funding, Better knowledge

In the following, the activities carried out in the framework of the action's implementation are presented in more detail.

1) Regular Action Group Meetings

The Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe invited to these monthly meetings on working basis representatives of all institutions involved in the action's implementation as well as coordinators of the partnership "Culture and Cultural Heritage" and representatives of the European Commission were invited to these meetings. Current developments concerning public libraries and Europe and the next steps in implementing the action were discussed and planned.

2) Questionnaire among national public library associations

In February 2021, national library associations were asked to fill out a short survey and to indicate in which policy areas and on which social challenges they would like to see a greater

consideration regarding the role and impact of public libraries at the European level. 24 library associations, 9 individual libraries and 1 public library consultancy institution participated in the survey.

The results were assessed and, on the basis of the results, the following six priority areas were identified for the future implementation of the action:

- Promoting Literacy and Learning
- Promoting Digital Skills and Media Competences
- Fostering Sustainable Societies
- Promoting Democratic Values
- Reducing Social Inequality and Fostering Social Inclusion
- Strengthening Innovation and Entrepreneurship

These focus areas also provided the basis for Public Libraries 2030's overview report and the cooperation with the School of Library and Information Science (Humboldt University Berlin).

3) Document/Policy Analysis in collaboration with the Berlin School of Library and Information Science

Several Bachelor's and Master's theses were prepared at the Berlin School of Library and Information Science on the subject matter of the action. One of them has systematically sought missed opportunities to include libraries in EU programmes and statements in the areas of equality in education, social inequalities and social inclusion. The result of the analysis showed that there were many attempts to advocate for the role of non-formal education in reducing educational inequality and promoting digital inclusion, as well as calling for a focus on digital public services and public spaces for socially excluded citizens. Nevertheless, European institutions have not yet included public libraries in their education and digital action plans or their strategy recommendations for the homeless and persons living in poverty.

4) Overview Report “Libraries on the European Agenda” by Public Libraries 2030

A report, funded by the partnership “Culture and Cultural Heritage” Technical Secretariat and prepared by the Brussels-based consultancy Public Libraries 2030, highlights the European challenges and priorities to which public libraries can make important contributions. It analyzes the important contributions of public libraries, where their potential is neglected, and how the EU can better integrate this potential in the future. An accompanying one-page set of recommendations is also included in the Annex, to be used in support of advocacy work with EU policymakers. It can be downloaded via <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/urban-agenda/culturecultural-heritage/library/action-5-raising-awareness-role-public-libraries>.

5) 1st joint webinar with EBLIDA “Public libraries as centres of European cities – Are they also on the European agenda?”

Together with the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) and other partners in the action group, the Public Libraries 2030’s overview report was presented to the professional public. It examines how public libraries can have a greater presence at European level. A recording of the webinar is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wa8-hFg6D5w>. 88 people participated in the webinar. The panelists agreed that the EU should integrate public libraries more into its policies in the coming years.

6) Presentation of the action during the Next Library Festival 2021

The action was presented at a workshop held at the Next Library Conference on 3rd June 2021. With around fifteen participants, ideas and visions for a new EU library policy were discussed. The main issue addressed was how public libraries can make even better use of EU funding programs for themselves. The cooperation partner for the workshop was the Central and Regional Library Berlin.

7) Contribution in the debate "Promoting the European values through education and culture" at the Committee of the Regions

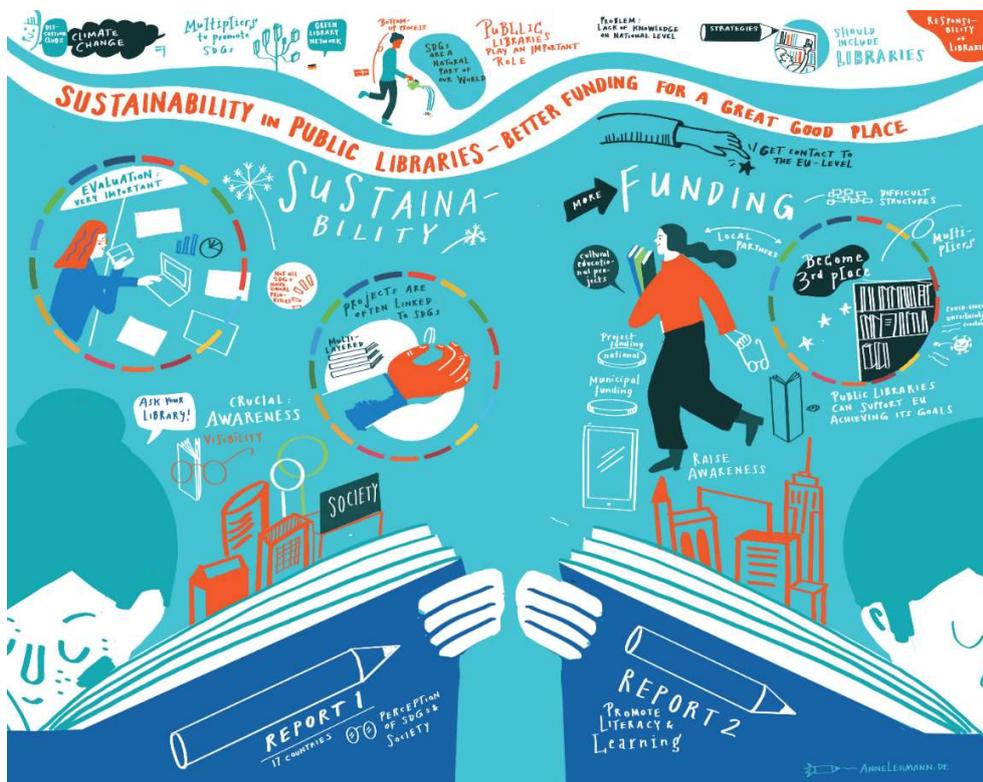
In the framework of the debate "Promoting the European values through education and culture" State Secretary Gerry Woop (Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe) emphasized the importance of public libraries for informal and lifelong learning as well as social and digital inclusion and thus built a bridge to the implementation of the action.

8) Survey on funding structures for public libraries in Europe

The survey aimed to acquire knowledge on financial sources and the possibilities of modernising and supporting innovation in public libraries in Europe. Responses were received from 92 public libraries in cities with a population of more than 90,000 in 20 EU Member States. The results should not be considered representative but provide an approximate overview of the state of funding for European public libraries. The public libraries that responded indicated that they had specific funding requirements for infrastructure and equipment measures that cities and regions cannot meet with funding from cities and regions. They expressed considerable uncertainty about potential budget cuts, particularly given the development of the COVID-19 pandemic.

9) 2nd joint webinar with EBLIDA “Sustainability in Public Libraries – Better Funding for a great good place”

A second joint webinar with EBLIDA discussed sustainable development in public libraries and considered their new roles as third places. A recording of the second webinar is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzxL0LP2R0s>. 75 people attended and the webinar has been summed up visualized by graphic recording by the illustrator Anne Lehmann. Sustainability was perceived by all participants in the discussion as a central field of action for public libraries in the coming decades.



Graphic Recording of the webinar “Sustainability in Public Libraries – Better Funding for a great good place”, © Anne Lehmann

5) Observations/Remarks/Recommendations

Throughout the implementation of the action, it was found that the enhancement of the potential of public libraries at the European and national level is a very relevant issue. Already during the public consultation of the the Partnership’s Action Plan in 2020, the action received a total of 54 answers, by far the most of any of the eleven actions. This remarkable number of answers showed that public libraries have a great need for their efforts to be valued at the

European and national level. This impression was also confirmed as other activities were implemented.

The action has made visible that

- Public libraries can help the European Union respond to current policy challenges.
- Libraries can be important local partners and multipliers for promoting the European idea and common goals for the future - because they reach citizens in their neighbourhoods, they enjoy a very high level of trust among citizens.
- There is a lack of clearly defined contacts, knowledge, and databases for public libraries at the European level.
- Public libraries have difficulties accessing funding from the European Union.

The following recommendations are relevant to the different levels of decision-making:

Local Level

- Local and regional authorities should support public libraries in gaining access to national and European funding, particularly through the Structural Funds, ESF+ and ERDF, which is essential for the implementation of infrastructural measures on the way to becoming third places.
- The recognition of the public library as an important basic infrastructure for all is key for reliable regular funding and the development of public libraries in an increasingly and rapidly changing urban environment.
- Cities and municipalities should involve public libraries as indispensable partners, as they are institutions that enjoy a high level of trust among the population when it comes to societal challenges, transformations, and urban development (with regard to mega-trends like digitalization, climate change, diversity, among others).

National Level

- The national level should ensure that public libraries in Member States receive adequate funding to become third places and centres of digital participation for all. Funding these transformative processes cannot be the sole responsibility of the city and the municipality.
- The national level should address the European level and promote the interests of public libraries.
- The national level should regularly exchange information with the local level, but also with other EU Member States, on the concerns of public libraries and other grassroots cultural

institutions. This exchange of experiences is important in order to keep the needs of those institutions in mind and to be able to involve them in addressing societal challenges.

- The national level should support the introduction of library laws (see e.g. the French library law passed in 2021⁴) to strengthen the position of public libraries and to raise their capabilities in the context of community building, education, and social cohesion.

EU Level

- Since public libraries are the urban institutions with the strongest ties to all parts of society, EU institutions should actively involve them as strategic partners in designing and implementing policies and programmes on literacy and learning, social inclusion, digital and media participation, democracy building, sustainability, innovation, and entrepreneurship.
- As public libraries work at the crossroads of education and training, culture, recreation and services to citizens, they do not readily integrate into traditional government structures divided by policy areas. Therefore, the European Commission should also develop a more holistic policy approach towards them by for example creating a joint task force of Commission departments and librarian experts from Member States to acquire more knowledge about public libraries and promote their potentials for Union policies in detail. Setting up contact persons for public library concerns at the European Commission would be supportive in this regard.
- As a result of the corresponding work in the Urban Agenda Partnership "Culture and Cultural Heritage", it was achieved that public libraries became an important part of the Council Work Plan for Culture 2023 - 2026. As part of the Work Plan, in workshops and at a conference, but especially in an OMC working group, strengthening the multiple role of libraries as gateways and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values should be considered. As a result, joint policy statements should be formulated (e.g. Council Conclusions) for example on the role of public libraries for lifelong learning, social coherence or digital participation for all. The European Parliament could also take up these recommendations and update its report on the role of libraries in the modern world to reflect the latest developments.
- Since libraries are not only institutions in their own right, but also offer an indispensable support structure for schools, education and training as well as higher education, the European Commission should take them into account more directly when addressing funding schemes like action programmes or the European Structure and Investment Funds (especially ESF+, ERDF and Cohesion Funds). Making these programmes more accessible to

⁴ <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000044537514>

public libraries would be a crucial step for the change of libraries to become modern institutions of information and social inclusion.

- Interest groups representing the concerns and needs of public libraries at the European level should be better equipped financially and with staff resources to adequately carry out their tasks.
- Public libraries and their associations should increase their visibility at the European level and be able to comment rapidly and coherently on policy developments. They should be in a position to express their opinions and contributions on their own initiative. Furthermore, they should actively engage in European formats such as, for example, the New European Bauhaus (as a project that has its core in promoting social inclusion), the Conference for the Future of the EU or in political consultations⁵.
- In the sense of a broad participation of European citizens, public libraries, as facilities heavily frequented by the population, should engage in European exchanges and learn from each other. More systematic use should be made of the exchange potential and support for programmes such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe. In this context, the establishment of a permanent European network (analogous to the 28 networks that have received funding from the Commission through the Creative Europe programme since 2014⁶) would be indispensable.
- Beyond this, the ongoing exchange of experience should also be reinforced between officials and administrations responsible for library development (e.g., library legislations, funding structures and institutional frameworks of libraries) in European cities and regions.

As an important infrastructure in cities, towns and municipalities, public libraries are examples of other institutions which play – to a certain extent – a similar role in supporting communities, e.g. small museums, municipal galleries displaying local artists, music schools or youth art schools. These institutions must also adapt continuously to people's needs and social challenges in order to play a positive role. In this context, they also need more attention at all policy levels. Consideration of these cultural institutions as part of a possible continuation of the Urban Agenda is hereby suggested.

⁵ Exemplary of such consultation is the public consultation on pathways to school success that took place in 2021, see also: https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/public-consultation-pathways-school-success_en

⁶ See also: <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/funding-creative-europe/culture-strand/european-networks>

Co-ordination Co-ordination

Germany

Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community

Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community

Italy

National Governmental Agency for the Territorial Cohesion

National Governmental Agency for the Territorial Cohesion

Ministry for Culture (MIC)

Ministry for Culture (MIC)

Official members Official members

- Cyprus - Ministry of Interior
- France - Ministry of Culture
- Spain - Ministry of Development and Public Works
- Greece – Ministry of Culture & Sports and Public Works
- Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region (SI)
- Intermunicipal Community of the Coimbra Region (PT) / Intermunicipal Community of the Coimbra Region (PT)
- Kazanlak Municipality (BG) / Intermunicipal Community of the Coimbra Region (PT)
- Flanders Heritage, Flemish Region (BE)
- Dutch Federation of Cultural Heritage Cities (NL)
- Katowice City Hall (PL) / Dutch Federation of Cultural Heritage Cities (NL)
- Alba Iulia Municipality (RO)
- Municipality of Nagykanizsa (HU)
- Marshal's Office of the Silesian Voivodeship (PL)
- City of Berlin (DE) / Marshal's Office of the Silesian Voivodeship (PL)
- Canary Island, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (ES)
- Bordeaux Metropole (FR) / Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (ES)
- City of Espoo (FI) / Metropole (FR)
- Jurmala City Council (LV)
- Úbeda City Council (ES) / City of Espoo (FI)
- City of Florence (IT) / City Council (ES)
- European Commission (DGs REGIO, EAC, RTD, DEVCO, AGRI, CLIMA, JRC, SG, EASME)
- European Committee of the Regions (DGs REGIO, EAC, RTD, DEVCO, AGRI, CLIMA, JRC, SG, EASME)
- European Investment Bank (the Regions)
- ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability
- Joint Programming Initiative on Cultural Heritage
- Eurocities (Programming Initiative on Cultural Heritage)
- URBACT (Cities)

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